

WASHINGTON

Hello, my name is April Reiter and as a Washington State native, I'd like to share some facts about Washington and shed some light on the reasons why I think the Evergreen State is one of the most beautiful and economically important in the US.

Washington, named after the first US president, George Washington, is often referred to as Washington state to differentiate it from the U.S. capital Washington D.C. (This may hurt Washingtonians' egos, but we can cope). With an estimated 6,897,000 people, it is the 13th most populous state in the nation, and at a size of roughly 185,000 km², it is about twice the size of Austria.

Washington has three neighbors: To the south, beyond the natural border formed by the Columbia River, lies Oregon. To the east, Idaho, which together with Washington form the region known as the Pacific Northwest. Included in this region is the Canadian province of British Columbia, which borders to the north.

The first European settlers to the Pacific Northwest were British and French fur trappers in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, but the greater Oregon Country (as it was known then) soon teemed with American settlers. The US government eventually gained control over the land, and Washington was admitted to the Union in 1889 as the 42nd state.

Before these settlers arrived, many diverse Native American tribes populated the land. The legacy of these tribes can be seen not only in city and county names (such as Spokane, Skagit, and Yakima) but also in various tribal events hosted throughout the state, including pow-wows and fairs.

Washington boasts a fabulously diverse geography and climate and is divided into two general parts by the Cascade Mountain Range, which runs north-south: while Western Washington is marked by a mild and wet marine climate, with rainforests and the beautiful Pacific Coast, the East is dominated by semi-arid and sometimes near-desert conditions in central Washington, with the Columbia River Gorge, and hilly pine forests closer to the border with Idaho

The Cascades not only split the state geographically, but also politically and culturally.

I grew up in eastern Washington, the more rural, conservative part of the state. My hometown is Spokane. The Lilac city has an estimated current population of about 210,000 people, making it the second largest city in the state (a fact Spokanites like to point out). Its claims to fame include the beautiful Spokane River and Riverfront Park and crooner Bing Crosby, who was born there. To the southeast lie the rolling hills of the Palouse, which, with the rest of central Washington, form the agricultural powerhouse of the state: Washington is first in the nation for many crops, including raspberries, apples, and hops. About 90 miles due west of Spokane stands the current largest hydropower producer in the US, the Grand Coulee Dam, completed in 1942.

Western Washington, the more liberal part of the state, is home to more than 60% of the state's population and most of its larger cities, including Tacoma, the state capital, Olympia,

and the largest city, Seattle, with around 620,000 inhabitants. Seattle, musically famous as the birthplace of grunge, also contains the most iconic Washington landmark, the Space Needle. Most Western cities sit directly on the Pacific Ocean inlet known as the Puget Sound, which encompasses beautiful islands accessible by ferry. The western landscape is also dominated by awe-inspiring and sometimes dangerous volcanic peaks, including the infamous Mt. St. Helens, which lost its top in 1980 in the deadliest volcanic eruption on record in the US.

Besides being a leader in agriculture, Washington is also home to many successful companies, including aeronautics manufacturer Boeing and product wholesale chain Costco. Seattle has also become a hub of technological innovation and talent, including such giants as Microsoft, Amazon, Valve, and Nintendo of America. And let's not forget perhaps the most famous Seattle native, Starbucks. while Starbucks now has around 22,000 locations worldwide, it got its humble start in 1971 at Seattle's famous Pike Place Market.

While I could go on and on about my home state, I hope you've enjoyed this small glimpse into the cultural and natural diversity that make Washington an amazing place to live. And I hope you'll be able to come and see the beauty of Washington for yourself someday.